

POLICY DISCUSSION: Waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE)

BACKGROUND: The WEEE Directive encourages and sets criteria for the collection, treatment, recycling and recovery of waste electrical and electronic equipment. It makes producers responsible for financing most of these activities (producer responsibility). Private householders are to be able to return WEEE without charge. There are targets for recycling and recovery of materials and components from the separately collected waste. The WEEE Directive covers a very wide range of products, in the following categories; large and small household appliances, IT and telecommunication equipment, consumer equipment (TV, video, hi-fi etc), lighting, electrical and electronic tools, toys, leisure and sports equipment, medical devices. Each category has a recovery and recycling target.

AFFECTED LA PARTIES: English, Welsh, Scottish and Northern Irish authorities.

TIMETABLE: WEEE and Restriction of Hazardous Substances (ROHS) Directives should be enacted in UK law by 13 August 2004. The main collection, treatment, recovery and recycling requirements and producer responsibility are deferred for a year after the Directive becomes law in the UK and will come into effect on 13 August 2005. The UK must ensure at least 250,000 tonnes (4kg per household) of WEEE is separately collected by – 31 December 2006 and Producers must ensure their recycling targets are met by 31 December 2006. First UK consultation response needed by 30 May 2003.

ISSUES: Local authorities do not **have to** provide a collection service for WEEE (though it is encouraged). The Directive does not require Producers to finance the recovery of WEEE before it reaches collection facilities. This means that should a LA wish to separately collect WEEE it cannot automatically expect a Producer to pay for any cost associated with separation or storage. Retailers and other distributors will be required to accept WEEE free of charge on a like for like basis, when a consumer buys an equivalent product. Returns of WEEE to be at least free of charge to last holders. Collection facilities should be sufficient to allow 'reasonable access', taking into account population density. Although the Directive does not impose duties directly on Local Authorities, Government considers that it makes sense for us to build on existing infrastructures wherever possible and to use Civic Amenity sites and other collection mechanisms where appropriate. These could extend to kerbside collections of WEEE by Local Authorities perhaps where these are funded through contributions by retailers in lieu of their take-back responsibilities? Reuse is supported in the Directive but has no clear means of implementation.

LARAC STANCE: LARAC should:

- ❑ Welcome the Directive as a further step toward developing more sustainable waste management systems
- ❑ Lobby for the fullest Producer Responsibility Obligations possible to ensure that the cost and hence financial pressure to minimise is realised by Producers and to ensure that no additional burdens are placed on local authorities
- ❑ Ensure that communication by industry is a key requirement funded under PR.
- ❑ Advise Government that PR for Packaging waste was obtuse and added little value to local authority activities and hence should not be a model for WEEE PR.
- ❑ Call for strong minimisation and reuse measures within the UK legislation
- ❑ Support retailer take-back if possible before the 2005 deadline.
- ❑ Call on WRAP to facilitate the development of a joint 'code of practice' between industry and local authorities.
- ❑ Support the infrastructure of community recycling facilities that reprocess WEEE.
- ❑ Encourage members to consider establishing separate collection facilities at CA sites (where practicable) as a means of increasing the public's ability to recycle and to increase recycling performance standards.